

## **ECA Update February 8, 2016**

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### **February 2016**

#### **EM Site-Specific Advisory Board**

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### **February 2016**

# 09

FY17 Budget Request

### **February 2016**

# 11

House Armed  
Services Subcommittee  
on Strategic  
Forces Hearing  
**"Fiscal Year 2017  
Budget Request for  
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### Measure supports storing spent nuclear fuel in New Mexico

AP: ABQ Journal

### WIPP continues improvements after 2014 fire

ABQ Journal

### People Consider What Should Be Included In Hanford National Park

North West Public Radio

February 5, 2016

[LINK](#)

Federal officials want to know: What should be included in the Manhattan Project National Historical Park at Hanford? They brought up the question at a public meeting Thursday in Richland — where people suggested everything from how the atomic bomb was developed at Hanford to what happened once it was dropped on Nagasaki.

It's the early stages of planning for a new national park site at Hanford. Officials at the Department of Energy and the National Parks Service want to make sure they're covering all the themes people would like to see presented at Hanford.

Sue Masica, National Parks Service Intermountain regional director, is overseeing all three locations for the Manhattan Project National Historical park.

"I think our role is: how do we help enrich and then draw people into wanting to explore the story more?" Masica said.

About 100 people attended the public meeting to talk about the different aspects that should be on display. This meeting was the first where the public could suggest what to include in the park.

### ***Defense Activities"*** (2:00 PM)

[Visit website.](#)

## August 2016

# 9-10

Third Annual  
Intermountain  
Energy Summit  
Idaho Falls, ID

[Visit website.](#)

## September 2016

# 14-15

DOE National Cleanup  
Workshop  
Hilton Alexandria Mark  
Center  
Alexandria, VA

[Visit website.](#)

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Maynard Plahuta, president of the B-Reactor Museum Association, wants the park to eventually be completely open to the public, where people can drive in off the highway and straight into the park.

He said he'd like to see the Bruggemann's Warehouse possibly used as an interpretive center. The historic agricultural warehouse needs to be restored, and Plahuta hopes for even more technical advances in its future.

"The parks are really going toward a lot of the modern technology, with smart phones and so on, so that people can use that and get their own story there, and they can listen to what they want. If it gets too technical, they can go to something else," Plahuta said.

Others were concerned that lesser-known stories be told, like the struggles African American workers went through during Hanford's construction.

Or environmental and health concerns.

Trisha Pritikin wanted to be sure the stories of the downwinders are included in the park.

"As a person born and raised in Richland, I know a lot of people who are now sick with radiogenic cancer, thyroid disease — I lost my own thyroid," Pritikin said. "I've very concerned [the downwinder stories] won't be included. It's been a consistent effort by the Department of Energy to minimize stories told by downwinders."

People could add their ideas and concerns to large white sheets of paper posted throughout the meeting room. They could also submit written comments. Officials said there will be more chances for community input as the planning process moves along.

The Manhattan Project National Historical Park will be at three different sites: Hanford, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Los Alamos, New Mexico, all areas integral to building the atomic bombs during World War II.

Hanford's portion of the park will also include the B-Reactor, the historic White Bluffs bank and Hanford High School.

**Source: Savannah River Site MOX funding to be severely cut in support of another plutonium disposition method**

Aiken Standard

February 6, 2016

[LINK](#)

President Barack Obama's fiscal year 2017 budget request will severely cut money for the Savannah River Site's MOX project in support of another plutonium disposition method, a source with knowledge of the budget request told the Aiken Standard on Friday.

The MOX project includes the unfinished SRS Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility, which, if completed, would convert 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear fuel.

The facility is 70 percent complete, according to the CB&I MOX Services, which is basing completion on construction. Energy Department officials said last year that the facility is only 40 percent complete based on the cost it will take to finish building.

The effort is being made to meet an agreement with Russia, which is also disposing of the same amount of plutonium.

The source added that there are also plans in place to prove that a downblending method would be a better choice to dispose of the plutonium.

The method would dilute the plutonium at SRS and ship it to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, or WIPP, in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

The Energy Department announced in December that it is planning to take six tons of SRS plutonium, not intended for MOX, and use the dilute and dispose process in an effort to rid South Carolina of unwanted nuclear materials.

But the effort may also be a way to prove that the downblending approach works more efficiently than MOX, the source said.

To that point, a spokesperson with the National Nuclear Security Administration, or NNSA, spoke highly of the downblending approach on Thursday.

“Per the direction of Congress, the Department is currently continuing construction of the MOX facility,” the spokesperson said.

“However, several analyses have all concluded that there is an alternative option that would be less than half the cost of the MOX fuel approach and have far lower risks – the dilution and disposal approach.”

The projected funding cuts would be in response to multiple studies over the last several months that concluded the MOX project is too costly to support.

A congressionally mandated report concluded in April that the MOX pathway carries a life cycle cost of \$51 billion, compared to a \$17 billion life cycle cost for downblending. In addition, Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said in June that it would take \$1 billion annually to properly fund MOX.

Congressmen from the Palmetto State have consistently voiced their disapproval of the cost projections, including Republican Rep. Joe Wilson who advocated for the project earlier this week during a House Budget Committee meeting.

"This facility is our only viable method at this time of disposing of weapons-grade plutonium and our country's only means to honor the Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement we have with the Russian Federation," Wilson said.

### **Los Alamos Historical Society Offering Overnight Tour To Trinity Site**

Los Alamos Daily Post

February 5, 2016

[LINK](#)

Trinity Site, the location where on July 16, 1945, the first man-made nuclear explosion was detonated, is open only twice a year, and the Los Alamos Historical Society is offering a guided tour to the site April 1 and 2 for the spring opening.

The Society's Trinity Tour includes a two-day, one night experience via the Alamogordo southern approach through the seldom-seen interior of White Sands Missile Range. Departure from Trinity Site will be out of the northern Stallion Gate, with a lunch stop at New Mexico Tech in Socorro.

Bonuses include a visit to the young (5,000-year-old) lava flows of Valley of Fires, and the New Mexico Space Museum overlooking the Tularosa Basin, Holloman Air Force Base, and White Sands Missile Range. This excursion aboard a comfortable, restroom-equipped coach includes experienced tour direction is by Buffalo Tours, leading its thirteenth trip to Trinity.

The cost for Historical Society members is \$350/person double occupancy; \$400 for non-members, with a \$50 single supplement for either. The price includes a tax-deductible donation to the Los Alamos Historical Society.

To reserve a spot, a \$100 per person down payment is required. Payments may be mailed to the Los Alamos Historical Society, PO Box 43, Los Alamos,

NM 87544 or made through PayPal on the Society's website, [www.losalamoshistory.org](http://www.losalamoshistory.org). The remainder is due by Monday, March 14. Refunds, minus a \$25 processing fee, can be made through March 18.

A complete itinerary is available on the Historical Society's website, [www.losalamoshistory.org](http://www.losalamoshistory.org).

### **Feds citing better nuclear waste disposal options**

Augusta Chronicle

February 6, 2016

[LINK](#)

One of the reasons U.S. nuclear power has fallen somewhat short of expectations is the failure to solve the nuclear waste problem. But now, great news: The Department of Energy is abandoning its heavy-handed approach to siting a national waste repository that led to failure at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

YUCCA WAS A case study in how not to site a waste facility. Basically, it was forced on a state that never wanted it. But now, the feds are seeking states that actually want to host a central waste facility. This is very good news for nuclear plants in Georgia and South Carolina, and elsewhere.

Specifically, federal officials are now encouraging private companies to promote potential nuclear waste disposal sites in willing states.

Among the current candidates are sites in western Texas and eastern New Mexico. State and local officials in these states are weighing the idea of playing host to a privately-operated facility that would accept spent fuel from nuclear power plants around the country.

This change in waste management strategy could clear the way for the removal of nearly 2,900 metric tons of used fuel stored at the Vogtle and

Hatch nuclear plants in Georgia. This spent fuel is kept in engineered water pools and concrete-and-steel casks, where it's been awaiting shipment to a permanent waste facility for many years.

IN THE SEARCH for a storage site capable of gaining public support, the Southwest is getting most of the attention, because it has been engaged in the development of nuclear technology for both commercial and military use since the dawn of atomic energy in the mid-1940s.

More recently, the city of Carlsbad, N.M., has been the site of a successful underground government repository known as the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, which holds long-lived plutonium-contaminated waste from the nuclear weapons program. This repository is situated in a large salt bed about a mile beneath the desert floor.

Nuclear waste from the DOE Savannah River Site and other nuclear weapons facilities is being shipped by rail and truck to the WIPP site. Carlsbad has benefitted greatly from government revenues and the thousands of jobs held by personnel who operate the repository, as well as scientists engaged in nuclear research.

The salt bed, which straddles both Texas and New Mexico, is now being considered as a possible alternative site for a permanent nuclear power waste repository. State and local officials are part of the siting process, in sharp contrast to Yucca Mountain, which Congress in the 1980s simply designated the nation's repository site, over Nevada's strong objections.

SCIENTISTS WHO have studied the properties of salt beds say they are superior to the rock at Yucca Mountain, because the salt beds contain no fissures through which water can reach a repository. Salt, moreover, can seal nuclear waste in place for geologic time – a million years or more.

Achieving progress on nuclear waste disposal is essential to lifting the burden of used fuel from America's fleet of existing nuclear plants, and allowing a new generation of nuclear power reactors.

To further illustrate the current problem, a dozen states – including California, Minnesota and Massachusetts – are using the waste problem as a reason for banning the construction of new nuclear power plants.

But nuclear energy still is critically important. It provides 20 percent of the nation's electricity and more than two-thirds of our emissions-free power. Thus, we should move now to the "willing states" program to find a permanent home for the nation's nuclear power waste.

(The writer is an energy and environmental consultant, based in Savannah. He was an assistant administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.)

### **Massive Hanford landfill to be expanded upward**

Tri-City Herald

February 6, 2016

[LINK](#)

Hanford officials are about to try something new in Hanford waste disposal.

Instead of digging another 70-foot-deep cell to hold more waste at the massive landfill in central Hanford, they plan to try piling it higher.

The plan has almost no cost but will allow about as much waste to be disposed of as could be held in one of the landfill's double cells, called supercells, said Dave Einan, an Environmental Protection Agency engineer. EPA, a Hanford regulator, has signed off on the plan.

The Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility has been built in stages, with more 70-foot-deep disposal cells added as needed and filled cells temporarily covered.

“We are just about to the point of filling those cells to a point where we need to add capacity to continue the cleanup work,” said Stacy Charboneau, Department of Energy manager of the Richland Operations Office.

The landfill is at the heart of Hanford cleanup, with low level radioactive or hazardous chemical waste hauled to the massive, lined landfill away from the Columbia River for disposal.

Now its cells, which have about 18 million tons of capacity, have only about a half-ton of capacity left.

Building a new supercell will cost \$30 million and still will be required in the next few years.

But by piling waste layered with soil higher, one less supercell should need to be constructed, freeing up \$30 million to spend for cleanup work and delaying construction of the next one. A supercell, measuring 500 feet wide and 1,000 feet long, can hold up to 3.6 million tons of material.

“It was an innovative idea, a good idea by Washington Closure Hanford,” said Mark French, the DOE project director responsible for cleanup along the Columbia River and the landfill. Washington Closure operates the landfill and has hauled in much of the waste it holds as it has torn down buildings and dug up burial grounds and contaminated soil near the river.

70 feet planned above-ground height of capped landfill at its center  
The row of cells at the landfill already are planned to be about 50 feet above grade at the center with a slight downward slope from there to allow water to run off rather than pooling over the landfill once it is closed, permanently capped and planted with vegetation.

The plan to expand upward will add an additional layer of waste material about 20 feet high, bringing the capped height at the center to about 70 feet high. Much of the mound over the landfill will have a 2 percent grade with a 12 percent grade for the side slopes.

At a distance, the landfill's new profile is expected to blend in with the Hanford landscape.

"Because of the scale of ERDF, you are not going to notice a huge difference," French said.

DOE already is expected to have some waste disposal areas with a profile above grade. Plans call for cleaning out the site's massive processing facilities and then collapsing their walls inward. The demolition debris would be covered with an earthen barrier rather than hauling the debris to a landfill for below ground disposal.

A temporary cover made of high-density polyethylene covered with soil already has been placed over part of the landfill that has been filled. Plans are being made to either cut holes in it, possibly by driving over it with a bulldozer, or to remove it entirely.

Removing or breaching the cap would allow any water, such as rainfall that falls on the landfill and could become contaminated, to be collected in a system above the liner at the bottom of the landfill.

Studies provided to EPA have shown that the existing landfill liner and leachate collection system have sufficient strength for the additional waste.

DOE is expected to still work toward having another supercell ready for use in about 2019. The landfill now has the equivalent of six supercells.

## Measure supports storing spent nuclear fuel in New Mexico

AP: ABQ Journal

February 4, 2016

[LINK](#)

New Mexico lawmakers are considering a pair of nonbinding measures that would signal support for the development of a temporary storage facility to house spent nuclear fuel that has been piling up at reactors around the nation.

The Senate Conservation Committee approved one of the memorials on a 6-3 vote during Thursday's meeting. The other is awaiting consideration by the full House.

Neither holds any legal weight, but supporters said Thursday that an endorsement from the state Legislature would help in what is likely to be a competitive process as the federal government weighs proposals for what to do with thousands of tons of spent nuclear fuel.

"The bottom line is we think this is a great project for our part of the state," said John Heaton, a former state lawmaker and chairman of the Eddy-Lea Energy Alliance, a consortium of city and county governments that has partnered with an international firm in the race to build an interim storage facility.

"As most of you who live in rural communities know, it's tough out there and we have to make our own way," Heaton told the committee.

The project would result in about 150 jobs and capital investment of more than \$1 billion, he said.

Other leaders from the region testified in support of the memorial, but environmentalists voiced concerns about New Mexico becoming the nation's nuclear dumping ground.

“We don’t believe nuclear energy is a bright path into the future. We believe nuclear generation is a ticking time bomb,” said Dan Lorimier with the Sierra Club.

Southeast New Mexico is still rebounding from the closure of the government’s Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, where a chemical reaction inside a drum of waste from Los Alamos National Laboratory resulted in a radiation release in February 2014. Despite contamination of parts of the underground repository, the U.S.

Department of Energy is aiming to resume some operations by the end of 2016.

The proposed storage facility sought by the Eddy-Lea Energy Alliance would be designed to handle spent nuclear fuel from power plants, not the kind of defense-related waste that was shipped to WIPP.

Federal officials have said the future of nuclear energy in the U.S. depends on the ability to manage and dispose of used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste. The DOE has plans to begin considering locations for interim storage facilities as part of its plan to spur the use of nuclear power and develop the transportation and storage infrastructure needed to manage the waste.

Heaton acknowledged the application and license process could take a few years.

### **WIPP continues improvements after 2014 fire**

ABQ Journal

February 5, 2016

[LINK](#)

CARLSBAD — Two years ago, two separate incidents at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant forced it to cease operations.

The first of those incidents was an unexpected fire on Feb. 5, 2014, in the underground that led to six workers being taken to Carlsbad Medical Center for smoke inhalation.

Although the second event, a radiological release on Feb. 14, 2014, is generally the one more focused on, WIPP has since made many efforts to improve upon fire safety and prevention at the WIPP site.

“I think culturally, everyone is more tuned into safety precautions and measures at a much greater level than we were before. There’s just been a big evolution in safety culture,” a WIPP spokesman said.

These efforts include improving their overall fire response protocol to purchasing new fire equipment.

The WIPP spokesman said on Thursday that perhaps the most important improvements made in regards to fire safety at WIPP was the creation of the new Emergency Operations Center and a new communication system that should be up and running by the end of this month.

“We are anticipating the installation of a new wireless system at the end of this month,” a spokesman said. “With it, every individual that goes into the underground will have a cellphone-like device that they can easily send messages and receive messages from.”

The spokesman said this new wireless system will be in addition to their current communication system. It is faster and will make communications better, he said.

The completed construction of the new Emergency Operations Center is also an improvement to the facility’s overall emergency response capabilities and

will allow employees at the WIPP facility who are managing an emergency event to provide real-time information, according to a WIPP news release.

Physical changes made in the underground also include the installation of automatic fire suppression systems on all diesel equipment and in specific areas of the underground.

These systems would prevent a fire from spreading if another were to break out.

“A key area that we have a fire suppression system is in an area that we store fuel in the underground,” the spokesman said.

Other steps taken to improve fire safety at WIPP was the purchase of new fire equipment for both the underground and surface.

Carlsbad Mayor Dale Janway said in an emailed statement everyone feels that WIPP is closing in on a reopening date, partly due to the many safety issues the site has addressed.

“As we approach the two year anniversary of the WIPP fire, I think we’re very clearly headed in the right direction in terms of prevention,” Janway said.